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THA 2258-600: Script Analysis

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Eastern Illinois University

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Theatre 2258: Script Analysis

fall 2021 / Section 600

Dr. Chris Wixson



Syllabus

course philosophy

The purpose of this course is twofold. One, we are going to read some plays very closely because part of being a theatre professional as well as a cultured individual is having a familiarity with the work of important playwrights. Two, according to the Eastern Illinois University course catalogue, Theatre Arts 2258 will also provide opportunities “to analyze playscripts in terms of and in preparation for performance and production, regardless of theatrical specialization.” Together, we will study “basic concepts and terminology associated with dramatic literature, examine several genres and their traits, and discover means of presenting the playwrights’ ideas on the stage.” THA 2258 dovetails with other Theatre Arts courses in helping you to develop your *craft* as well as cultivate your understanding of theatre as an art form, providing a basis for your analytical process as an actor, director, dramaturg, or designer.

THA 2258 is a reading-intensive course with a schedule that requires time and attention devoted to our scripts. The most talented and consistently interesting theatre practitioners are avid readers; careful, critical, and meaningful reading is as *vital and necessary* a skill as any in the theatre. Hence, THA2258 is a required core course in the major.

THA 2258 is also writing-intensive course, designed to improve skills in critical thinking and analytical expression in order to enable you to meet the challenges of future academic tasks and enhance your proficiency in communication.

Success in this course hinges upon your commitment to self-directed work, **not just** reading the textbooks/our plays in preparation for our sessions together but diligently working on your individual project.

Learning Goals

This course will provide opportunities

1. To analyze plays in terms of and in preparation for production and performance;
2. For understanding basic concepts and terminology associated with dramatic literature;
3. To broaden knowledge of dramatic literature through reading, writing, and class discussion of plays from different periods and genres;
4. To enhance skills of critical thinking and interpretive analysis.

course texts

Backwards and Forwards, David Ball

Ashes to Ashes, Harold Pinter

The Piano Lesson, August Wilson

The Little Foxes, Lillian Hellman

Closer, Patrick Marber

The Wolves, Sarah DeLappe

Far Away, Caryl Churchill

Father Comes Home from the Wars, Suzan-Lori Parks

Shorts by Samuel Beckett, Susan Glaspell, and Eugene Ionesco (D2L)

Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers, James Thomas

contact information

Dr. Chris Wixson

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****I check email very frequently so please don't hesitate to contact me with questions. However, I tend to go to sleep around 9:00 PM CST. As such, if you have a question that needs answering that night, get it to me by 8:30; otherwise, your answer will be in your mailbox around 6:30 AM CST the following morning.**

office hours

DFAC 1351

TR 8:00-10:30 AM, W 12-1 PM, and by appointment

****If you are on campus, the above are my face-to-face office hours. Please let me know you are coming *in advance*; in accordance with IBHE and public health directives, masking is REQUIRED, and the office space will be properly socially-distanced.**

If you are not on campus or would prefer to meet virtually via Zoom for whatever reason, let me know, and we can make arrangements to do so, including finding a mutually convenient time. Email too can be a good and safe way to get questions answered, feedback on your writing, and guidance during the process of assignments.

an online course in practice

As we discovered over the past couple semesters, the online experience is a change from traditional face-to-face classroom learning but especially enhances creativity, self-direction, and articulate expression in writing, all **essential skills** in the professional world. This course may well involve slightly less reading than you expect but certainly more writing than you may be used to, in order to demonstrate your understanding of course concepts and readings. The time and labor investment is the same, but their expressions will "look" different and feel more independent, as will our course schedule.

Each week of the term will have readings/viewings that are the equivalent of two "sessions" along with prompts for varied remote course activities in response to those readings/viewings that must be completed and submitted via D2L. All course materials (except for the TRS textbooks) will be located on D2L/accessed on the internet. We may seek opportunities *if possible* for synchronous interaction, though **never** if it will disadvantage students who do not have reliable devices/access to strong Wifi signals or who have difficult schedules related to jobs or child/elder care. As we all navigate the challenging contours of the new normal, let's work together to make the course a meaningful experience.

assignments

- *Short Analysis Papers — three opportunities to demonstrate what you have learned in 3-4 page papers (Action Analysis, Given Circumstances, Character Analysis)
- *Micro-Analyses – Short, focused activities that count as active, engaged class participation
- *Full Formalist Analysis – a complete formal analysis covering all elements of your selected play, at least 10 pages in length
- *A Take-Home Final Exam Formalist Analysis of *Ashes to Ashes*

final grades

Your final grade in the course will be determined by your performance on the following assignments:

Analysis Papers (each 3-4 pages in length)	30%
Micro-Analyses (seven focused activities)	25%
<i>Ashes to Ashes</i> Project (Final)	25%
Formalist Analysis (10-12 pages in length)	20%

**You must complete all assignments to complete the course. Failure to complete any one of the components represents incomplete work for the semester and anyone with incomplete work will not receive a passing grade for the course.

class participation

Participation in an inquiry-based, general education course means careful, full preparation of the reading, insightful contributions to discussion threads, and risk-taking in writing and thinking. Saying you are “frustrated” with the reading and thus have nothing to contribute is intellectually lazy and irresponsible. Consult the participation rubric on D2L for a sense of how I approach assessing the contributions you make.

These texts are demanding but rewarding; while there will be frustration with their complexity at times, this course understands that complexity as part of the challenge to which we aspire to rise during the semester. You may not *like* this class or all of the readings we discuss — which is fine. You won’t like everything you have to do in life to move forward. College is a time to develop the skills to learn what is required in a professional, respectful manner and demonstrate to your professors that you grasp the course content.

You may not *like* this class or all of the readings we discuss — which is fine. You won’t like everything you have to do in life to move forward. College is a time to develop the skills to learn what is required in a professional context and demonstrate to your professors that you grasp the course content. Don’t come to class and sleep, check your phone, or otherwise distract others and disrupt the process. In short, you are expected to work actively to contribute to the class’s overall movement and to strive to make the course a success. **I TAKE THIS SUBJECT VERY SERIOUSLY.**

late papers

These are no fun for me to keep track of and only put you further behind. For each day beyond the scheduled due date, assignments will be penalized a third of a letter grade. **After a week, I will no longer accept the assignment, and it becomes a “O.”** Again, if you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.

academic integrity

Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author—that the wording and major ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by either quotation marks and/or citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use (appropriation and/or imitation) of others’ materials (words and ideas). Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the Student Standards Office.

if you are experiencing trauma or distress

Please note that, while reading and writing can be very personal acts, this class is not a therapeutic environment and should not be taken in place of therapy. If you are experiencing personal issues, depression, anxiety, trauma, etc, your best resource is always the EIU Counseling Clinic, 1st floor of the Human Services Building, which takes walk-in appointment requests and can also be reached at 217-581-3413 during the day, and 1-866-567-2400 in case of after-hours emergency. Do not hesitate to take advantage of this resource—it's yours. As a State of Illinois employee, I'm a Mandated Reporter and must also report incidents of sexual assault or violence to our Title IX Coordinator.

student success center

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to McAfee 1301.

special accommodations

If you have a *documented* disability and are in need of academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (studentdisability@eiu.edu or 581-6583) or visit McAfee 1210 as soon as possible in order to receive approval.

tech support

If you need assistance with D2L, call D2L Support toll free at 1-877-325-7778. Support is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Email and Chat options are also available on the "My Home" page after logging in to D2L. Other D2L resources including a D2L Orientation course for students are available on the same page. For technical questions regarding other software, hardware, network issues, EIU NetID/password, or Panthermail, contact the ITS Helpdesk at 217-581-4357 during regular business hours or submit a help ticket at <https://techsupport.eiu.edu/>. If you have a question regarding course content, contact your instructor.

Theatre 2258: Script Analysis

Dr. Chris Wixson

course calendar

****** Because this schedule can and probably will change, it is imperative that you access it frequently on D2L so as to note any revisions. Please get into the habit of regularly checking email and D2L.

****** Both of our textbooks (Ball and Thomas) assume a working knowledge of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for the purposes of illustration. If you have not read these plays, it is a good idea to do so as soon as possible.

Week One (August 23) – Script Analysis, Backwards and Forwards

Read: Beckett's "Breath" / Cangiullo's "Detonation Synthesis" (D2L)
Notes 1 and Notes 2 (D2L)
Susan Glaspell's "Trifles" (D2L) / *Backwards and Forwards* Part One
****Micro-Analysis #1 Due to D2L on Friday 8/27 by 11:59 PM**

Week Two (August 30) – Formalist Analysis

Read: *Backwards and Forwards* Parts Two and Three
Script Analysis "Introduction"
Notes 3 and Notes 4 (D2L)
"Neutral Dialogue" Prompt (D2L)
Select your Play, Obtain a Reading Script, and "Prepare" the Script
****Micro-Analysis #2 Due to D2L on Friday 9/3 by 11:59 PM**

Week Three (September 6) – Action Analysis Part One

Read: Hellman's *The Little Foxes*
Script Analysis Chapter 1 (Only "For Realistic Plays" and End Questions)
Notes 5 / Action Analysis Assignment Sheet (D2L)
Sample External/Internal Event Chain for *The Little Foxes* (D2L)
Optional Zoom Conferences / Draft Feedback via Email

Week Four (September 13) – Action Analysis Part Two

Read: Hellman's *The Little Foxes*
Script Analysis Chapter 1 (Only "For Realistic Plays" and End Questions)
Notes 6 / Action Analysis Assignment Sheet (D2L)
Optional Zoom Conferences / Draft Feedback via Email
****Both Parts of Action Analysis Due to D2L dropbox on Friday 9/17 by 11:59 PM**

****This weekend is the *Up All Night Performance Festival* which is a student-created event in which a performance is crafted in just 24 hours. If you are on campus and feel comfortable doing so, PLEASE consider attending the FREE performance at 7:30 PM on Saturday, September 18th in the Black Box Theatre.**

If you wish to be part of the group of artists collaborating on the event, behind the scenes or on the stage, please come to the kickoff meeting at 7:00 PM Friday, September 17th in the Black Box Theatre.

Week Five (September 20) – Background Story Analysis and Parks' *Father Comes Home from the Wars*

Read: *Script Analysis* Chapter 3 (only "For Realistic Plays" and End Questions)
Parks' *Father Comes Home from the Wars* Part One (D2L)
Notes 7 and Notes 8 / Background Story Analysis Assignment Sheet

****Micro-Analysis #3 (Discussion Forum Post) Due on Friday, 9/24 by 11:59 PM**

Week Six (September 27) – Given Circumstances Analysis

Read: *Script Analysis* Chapter 2 (only "For Realistic Plays" and End Questions)
Notes 9 / Given Circumstances Analysis Assignment Sheet (D2L)

****Given Circumstances / Background Story Analysis Due Friday 10/1 by 11:59 PM**

Week Seven (October 4) – Formalist Character Analysis and Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*

Read: Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*
Script Analysis Chapter 6 (only "For Realistic Plays" and End Questions)
Notes 10 and Notes 11 / Character Analysis Assignment Sheet (D2L)

Screen: Film Version of *The Piano Lesson*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgXmTMFzp3E>

(Runs an hour and 40 minutes)

****Micro-Analysis #4 on *The Piano Lesson* due Friday 10/8 by 11:59 PM**

Week Eight (October 11) – Role Scoring and Finalizing the Character Analysis

Read: *Script Analysis* Chapter 6 (only "For Realistic Plays" and End Questions)
Notes 12 / Character Analysis Assignment Sheet (D2L)
Optional Zoom Conferences / Draft Feedback via Email

****Character Analysis for Two Characters Due Friday 10/15 by 11:59 PM**

Week Nine (October 18) – Character and Structural Variations in Marber's *Closer*

Read: Marber's *Closer*
Notes 13 (D2L)
Screen: Film Version of *Closer* (D2L)

****Micro-Analysis #5 Due to D2L Friday 10/22 by 11:59 PM**

Week Ten (October 25) – Character Variations in DeLappe's *The Wolves*

Read: DeLappe's *The Wolves* (D2L)
Notes 14 (D2L)

****Micro-Analysis #6 Due to D2L Friday 10/29 by 11:59 PM**

Week Eleven (November 1) – Departures from Realism: Non-Realistic Script Analysis

Read: Churchill's *Far Away* (D2L)

Notes 15 (D2L)

****Micro-Analysis #7 Due to D2L Wednesday 11/3 by 11:59 PM**

Read: Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* (D2L)

Script Analysis (pp. 27-37; 65-72; 92-4; 196-8) on Non-Realistic Script Analysis

Notes 16 (D2L)

Week Twelve (November 8) – Full Formalist Analysis

Read: Full Formalist Assignment Sheet (D2L)

Notes 17 (Including Sample Conflict Analysis) (D2L)

Sample *Mise-en-scène* Analysis (D2L)

Week Thirteen (November 15) – Finalizing the Full Formalist Analysis

Optional Conferences / Draft Feedback via Email

****Full Formalist Analysis Assignment Due Friday 11/19 by 11:59 PM**

HAPPY THANKSGIVING BREAK!!!!

Week Fourteen (November 29) – Preparing the Final Exam Analysis

Read: Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*

Final Exam Assignment Sheet (D2L)

"Preparing the *Ashes to Ashes* Script" (D2L)

Week Fifteen (December 6) – Finalizing the Final Exam Analysis (Three Components)

Final Exam Preparation

****Final Exam due (to D2L dropbox): Thursday, December 15th by 11:59 PM.**